

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus for filtering electronic mail and notifying a user, residing on a set top box connected  
5 between a television content provider, an Internet provider having an e-mail server, and a television, comprising;

a software program which enables a user to specify e-mail filter criteria and notification icons which then  
10 retains and stores said e-mail filter criteria and icons;

a querying module contained within said software program which queries said e-mail server to determine whether e-mail fulfilling said e-mail filter criteria has arrived at said e-mail server;

15 a notifying module also contained within said software program wherein, upon arrival of an e-mail fulfilling said criteria, said application notifies the user by posting said notification icons to the set top box.

20 2. An application as in claim 1, wherein the connection between said set top box and said e-mail server is permanent, so that said application continually queries said e-mail server.

25 3. An application as in claim 1, wherein

the connection between said set top box and said e-mail server is non-permanent, so that said application queries said e-mail server at specific timed intervals.

5           4.    An application as in claim 1, wherein  
            said set top box contains an multi-tasking Operating  
            System and said application runs on top of said Operating  
            System.

10           5.    An application as in claim 1, wherein  
            said set top box contains an single-tasking Operating  
            System and said application remains in memory as a  
            Terminate and Stay Resident program and runs  
            intermittently at user-configurable intervals.

15           6.    An application as in claim 1, wherein  
            said application notifies the user of the existing of  
            e-mail messages fulfilling said e-mail filter criteria  
            through a notification icon on the television screen.

20           7.    An application as in claim 6, wherein  
            said notification icon is configurable by the user,  
            and reflects the content of the e-mail filter criteria.

25           8.    An application as in claim 1, wherein  
            said application notifies the user through the use of  
            an tone generated through the television speaker.

9. An application as in claim 8, wherein  
said tone is configurable by the user, and reflects  
the content of the e-mail filter criteria.

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10. An application as in claim 6, wherein  
said application notifies the user of a plurality of  
said e-mail messages wherein each e-mail message satisfies  
different filter criteria and has a different user  
notification icon.

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11. An application as in claim 1, wherein  
said application queries said e-mail server upon  
power-up of said set top box, and immediately notifies the  
user of the existence of any e-mail messages satisfying  
the user-specified e-mail filter criteria.

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12. An application as in claim 1, wherein  
said application notifies the user via a pager rather  
than through said set top box.

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13. An application as in claim 1, wherein  
said application notifies the user of the existence  
of a telephone call with Caller ID satisfying said filter  
criteria, instead of an e-mail message.

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14. An application as in claim 1, wherein

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said application notifies the user of another user attempting to make Instant Message contact with said first user.

5           15. An application as in claim 1, wherein  
newer versions of said application are downloaded to  
said set top box by said Internet provider.

10           16. An application as in claim 15, wherein  
said downloading of newer versions can distinguish  
between different types of set top boxes, and make  
adjustments to the content of said download accordingly.

15           17. An application as in claim 1, wherein  
said application is not resident on said set top box,  
but is resident on said e-mail server.

20           18. An application as in claim 1, wherein  
said set top box is connected to said e-mail server  
through a middle server, where said application is  
resident on said middle server.

25           19. A method of filtering e-mail messages and  
notifying a user, comprising:

installing a software program on a set top box,  
wherein said set top box is connected both to a TV content  
provider and an e-mail server;

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configuring said program with specific e-mail  
criteria and also notification symbols;

queuing incoming e-mail messages at said e-mail  
server;

5        querying said e-mail server as to whether any of said  
queued messages fulfill said criteria; and

notifying a user that e-mail messages fulfilling said  
criteria are available on said e-mail server.

10        20. An e-mail filtering and notification  
application, comprising:

a set top box, connected between a TV content  
provider, an Internet provider having an e-mail server,  
and a TV;

15        user-input means for allowing a user to specify e-  
mail filter criteria and notification icons;

retaining and storing means for retaining and storing  
said criteria and icons;

20        querying means, for querying said e-mail server to  
determine whether e-mail fulfilling said user criteria has  
arrived at said e-mail server;

notification means for notifying the user of said  
arrival by posting said notification icons to the Set Top  
Box.

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21. An software application for filtering electronic  
mail and notifying a user, residing on a set top box

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connected between a television content provider, an  
Internet provider having an e-mail server, and a  
television, comprising;

5        said software program enabling a user to specify e-  
mail filter criteria and notification icons which then  
retains and stores said e-mail filter criteria and icons;

      a querying module which queries said e-mail server to  
determine whether e-mail fulfilling said e-mail filter  
criteria has arrived at said e-mail server;

10       a notifying module wherein, upon arrival of an e-mail  
fulfilling said criteria, said application notifies the  
user by posting said notification icons to the set top  
box.

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